There were no tribal wars during my stay at Sharjah, one of the reasons for this being the shortage of ammunition. The sheikhs are allowed a small ration of ammunition for defence against desert raiders, but this is insufficient for purposes of war. The Arabs were obliged to find other means of obtaining bullets. Thefts from the R.A.F. and American camps were frequent, and on one occasion several thousand rounds were stolen. The culprits were never caught, but some of the ammunition was later traced to the private armoury of a local sub-sheikh. Condemned ammunition stocks provide another source of supply. When the R.A.F. dumped a hundred cases of condemned .303 bullets into the creek, Arab pearl divers who had been waiting in readiness plunged into the water and brought most of it ashore.

In the heart of the desert, away from towns or villages, the shortage of ammunition often proves a hardship to the tribes, who rely on their rifles for much of their food supplies. They are thus obliged to manufacture their own cartridges, filling them with a home-made gunpowder obtained from the *ashgar* bush, the stems of which contain saltpetre. It is not a very satisfactory preparation, and many of the hunters have blown themselves up, but that has not proved a deterrent.

The Arab is a born fighter; as a child he learns to handle the curved *hangar*, or dagger, and to shoot gazelle with the silver damascened rifle which his father stole from the British. They are good shots, cunning in guerilla warfare; they will lie flat on their bellies, half-hidden by the scrub, and approach their enemies like snakes. Unfortunately they take very poor care of their arms; their rifles become corroded and clogged with dirt and are apt to explode in their faces when fired. Yet their daring tactics and fanaticism make them a formidable fighting force, and the sheikhs' armies, recruited from amongst the wild tribesmen, would prove a serious obstacle even to trained modern armies if the Arabs were united.

As long as the present sheikhs are in power, and the British Residency Agent, the Khan Bahadur Abdur bin Razzak (who has retired to his estates at Quait since this was written), exercises authority at Sharjah, tribal war is unlikely to break out on the Trucial Oman coast. The Khan Bahadur controls a large body of Arab spies in every town, hamlet and camp, and the slightest whisper of a revolt reaches him with little delay. In any event, war between the town sheikhs, who are for the most part related

228 earliest times the sheikhs have derived a considerable proportion of their incomes from profits of the pearl trade; it is in their interest to pool their efforts during the season and abstain from hostilities. 622 The only men who are not allowed to take part in pearling are the 703 sheikh's soldiers and guards, who are continually on duty, and are not allowed to leave their respective towns without permission. They are usually recruited from various tribes, never from a single tribe; so that there is little danger of disaffection or of combination against their employer.

Our own guards at the Fort, who numbered about forty men, were supplied by the Sheikh of Sharjah, but they were not natives of Oman. Known as Askharis, they originate from the hill districts of Muscat, and are noted for their fearlessness and toughness as fighters. They were a villainous-looking lot of ruffians, but I got to know them individually very well indeed, and liked them [522] immensely. They were always fond of a joke and had a broad sense of humour, even if it was sometimes childish. I could trust them implicitly, as they were possessed of a dog-like loyalty and would have laid down their lives for me. They were immensely proud of their responsibility in guarding the Fort, and were extremely hurt on one occasion when I asked Cranley to provide an R.A.F. guard for an aircraft which, owing to an engine change, had to be retained at Sharjah for the night. They considered that they should have been entrusted with the task, and sulked about it for days. The reason for my action was not distrust of the Askharis or their capabilities as guards, but the simple fact that according to our regulations a British military guard must be provided for aircraft.

They were paid rather badly by the sheikh, and in consequence were invariably on the cadge for food and items of discarded clothing. These requests were usually made through their leader, Khofan, a fine-looking old man with a silky white beard, who was a past master in the art of asking favours. He was so courteous and kindly that it was difficult to refuse him. One of his most persistent requests was that I should provide his men with a barousti hut outside the Fort, so that in wet or cold weather they would not have to make the journey to Sharjah. I should have liked to give him his hut, but unfortunately we had no labour or materials and the Public Works Department attached to the R.A.F. were far too busy with camp enlargements to be able to oblige me.

000 I have mentioned that tribal wars were largely due to a lack of